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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000524

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL UK EI

SUBJECT: IRISH OFFICIALS ON NORTHERN IRELAND TALKS

REF: LAKHDHIR E-MAIL 12/01/09

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Classified By: DCM Robert J. Faucher. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In separate meetings on December 2 and 3, Kevin Conmy of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and Paul McGarry of the Irish Prime Minister's Office briefed us on ongoing talks between GOI and HMG about Northern Ireland. The aim of these meetings is to follow up on the meeting between UK Prime Minister Brown and Irish Prime Minister Cowen on November 30 (ref). What needs to be done, according to our interlocutors, is to decouple the devolution of policing and justice from any other issues (especially parades). They said devolution must be agreed to before Christmas, or the whole process could break down. They are aware of the possibility of failure, but remain cautiously optimistic. Conmy is Chief of the Reconciliation and Coordination Section of the Anglo-Irish Division of the DFA, and McGarry is in the Northern Ireland and International Division of the PM's office. END SUMMARY.

IRISH FRUSTRATED WITH UNIONISTS

¶12. (C) Both of our interlocutors reported frustration on the Irish side with Northern Ireland First Minister Peter Robinson. (of the Democratic Unionist Party) DUP). McGarry said that Robinson had made "abolition of the parades commission a pre-condition" for setting a date for devolution of policing and justice. Having any precondition for devolution was unacceptable to Sinn Fein and rightly so, as Sinn Fein had stuck by its side of the bargain on devolution.

DE-LINKING DEVOLUTION AND PARADES

¶13. (C) Conmy and McGarry described the purpose of ongoing meetings between the Irish DFA and PM's office and the British Northern Ireland Office (NIO) as devising an approach that would get the DUP and Sinn Fein talking about all of the St. Andrew's Agreement issues (parades, Irish language, North-South all-island cooperation) separately from devolution. Dealing with all of the St. Andrew's issues as a package, they hoped, would bring Sinn Fein to the table on parades and enable Robinson to walk back from making parades a pre-condition for devolution. What was needed, they said, was some sort of political declaration or commitment from Robinson before Christmas on a start date for devolution. If Robinson did not commit to a start date before Christmas, they said, Sinn Fein might leave the Northern Ireland Executive and force early elections.

A DRASTIC "PLAN B"

¶14. (C) Our interlocutors added that the Irish and the NIO were also discussing a "Plan B," which would mean the British taking up de facto day-to-day governance of Northern Ireland in close collaboration with the Irish, in the event of a failure to reconstitute a functioning Northern Ireland executive after elections. McGarry emphasized that Plan B would not come into effect before at least one, probably two, elections in Northern Ireland, and Conmy said Plan B was meant more as a way to pressure Robinson to cooperate with Sinn Fein and agree to devolution than as an imminent possibility.

CRITICISM OF THE BRITISH

¶15. (C) Both Conmy and McGarry (STRICTLY PROTECT) opined that the British had been too easy on Robinson, in effect allowing him to link parades with devolution. Conmy (STRICTLY PROTECT) said Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness (Sinn Fein) was upset about British Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward's actions on a recent trip to the U.S. Woodward had apparently complained to American interlocutors about McGuinness, being problematic. The Americans had then called &their friends in Sinn Fein8 to report that.

VERY SOBERLY OPTIMISTIC

¶16. (C) Our interlocutors summed up the situation as dicey, with a real chance of failure. They maintained, though, that they were basically optimistic that they would find a way to

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package the St. Andrew,s issues in a form that both Sinn Fein and Robinson could accept, and that would allow Robinson to agree to devolution by Christmas.

ROONEY